

Documentation, Analysis, and Writing of TAM markers in Vera'a

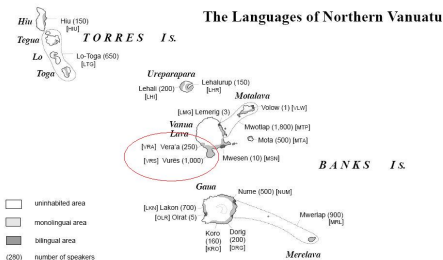
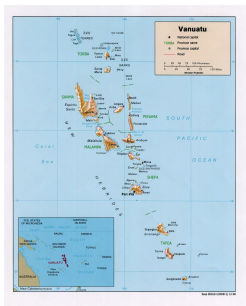
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1st International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation

Language and speakers

- genetic affiliation: Austronesian, Oceanic, Northern Vanuatu, Banks Is. (Lynch et al. 2001)
- location: West / North-West Vanua Lava, Banks Is., Northern Vanuatu
- number of speakers: approx. 300
- neighbouring languages: closely related Vurës (approx. 1,000 speakers), Lemerig, Mwesen (both moribund)



Language Documentation Project

VolkswagenStiftung-funded DoBeS Project:

"Documentation of Vurës and Vera'a, the two surviving endangered languages of Vanua Lava, Vanuatu"

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| duration: | Nov 2006 - Oct 2009 |
| linguistics: | Catriona Malau (Vurës); Stefan Schnell (Vera'a) |
| other disciplines: | anthropology, ethno-musicology, marine-biology, botany |
| aim: | thorough documentation of the languages in cultural context |
| academic output: | description of the language (sketch grammar) multi-media lexical database doctoral thesis |
| output for community: | story books printed dictionary |



Data collection and processing in the field

Types of data I

RECORDINGS:

- format: audio and video recordings
- interaction: (mostly) non-interactive (monologues)
- text genres: traditional and contemporary stories
memories of local history (e.g. hurricane, landslide, WWII)
procedural texts (e.g. house building, cooking)
descriptions / explanations (e.g. plants and their use as food, medicine, etc.)



Data collection and processing in the field

Transcription, translation, editing

TRANSCRIPTIONS: by two, later only one native speaker
later checked by myself

TRANSLATIONS: Bislama: by native speaker
English: by myself with assistance
of language teachers

EDITING OF STORIES: by one native speaker
(who also transcribes)



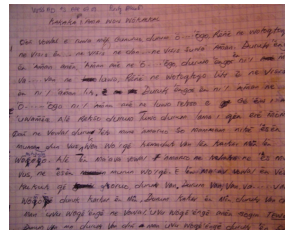
Data collection and processing in the field

Types of data II

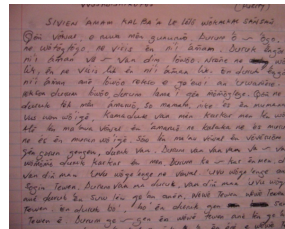
WRITTEN TEXT:

transcriptions of recordings

edited texts (stories)



Transcribed text



Edited text

Basic clause structure and position of TAM markers

Vera'a has SVO word order and the first element of the verbal predicate is a tense-aspect-mood (TAM) marker:

SUBJNP TAM VERB (OBJNP)

- (1) nak susuō **ga** tik
 boat paddling TAM small
 'The canoe is (too) small.'

HHAK.010

Basic clause structure and position of TAM markers

TAM marker occurs in clause-initial position:

e.g. where subject is omitted under co-reference

- (2) 'ama-ruō **ne** kalraka [**ne** van lē =n gamal]
father-3DL TAM get.up TAM go LOC =ART mens'.house
'Then their (two) father got up [(and) went to the mens' house].' MVBW.107

The problematic cases

Formal status of TAM markers

- (3) no **m** le n gunu-k
1SG TAM take ART spouse-1SG

'I took a wife.'

1.JS.094

- (4) no **k** van ma
1SG TAM go hither

'Then I came here..'

JJQ.403

Problem of segmentation / word boundaries (cf. Himmelmann 2006):

1. In transcriptions of the recordings
2. For linguistic analysis

The problematic cases

Formal status of TAM markers

The morph *k* is one allomorph of a more complex morpheme (called 'AORIST in Francois (2007)), the allomorphy of which is conditioned by PERS / NUM of SUBJ (examples meaning: 'I will go.'; 'You will go.'; ...):

AORIST:

| PERS/NUM | PRO | ALLOMORPH | VERB |
|---------------|--------|-----------|------|
| SINGULAR: | | | |
| 1SG | no | k | van |
| 2SG | nikē | Ø | van |
| 3SG | di | ne | van |
| NON-SINGULAR: | | | |
| e.g. | | | |
| 3PL | dirē | k | van |
| 2DL | kumru | k | van |
| 3TL | dir'öl | (k) | van |

The problematic case

Formal status of TAM markers

The morph *m* is the only allomorph of a morpheme *M*.

Comparison with neighbouring languages and historical reconstructions suggest that both forms once consisted of a CV syllable, probably a prefix or proclitic to the verb. Subsequently, vowel deletion occurred, a frequent development in the languages of the area (cf. Francois 2007).

Phonological word

Syllable structure and allophony

Phonological word = preceding PRO + TAM marker

(3') a. no **m** len [...]

b. |nɔ**m**|lɛn|

(4') a. no **k** van ma

b. |nɔ**k**^ʔ|van|ma|

syllable structure: CCV(C) or (C)VCC are not attested elsewhere

allophones of /k/: word-final: [k^ʔ], else: [k]

Phonological word

Syllable structure

Fusional tendencies with preceding elements, either nouns or pronouns:

- (5) a. /mɛʔ/ - 'reef'

me m lōl

reef TAM be.flooded

'The reef got flooded'

GAQG.017

- b. |mɛm|lōl|

- (6) a. /kamam/ - '1PL.EXCL'

kama k mul kal ma

1PL.EXCL TAM go upwards hither

'We came up here.'

JJWR.050

- b. |kamakʔ|mulō|

Grammatical word

Preceding word

The category of the word preceding the TAM markers is open, usually the last or only constituent of the subject NP:

- (7) a. e raga 'anē **m** rem-rem lē n 'erē dara
ART people DEM TAM RED:climb LOC ART PL tree.sp.
'They climb on the *dara* trees.'

JJQ.143

b. |ʔanēm|remrem|

- (8) a. e raga 'anē **k** van ma
ART people DEM TAM go hither
'Then these people came here.'

HHAK.028

b. |ʔanəkʷ|van|

→While the word preceding the TAM marker varies, the word following it appears to be invariably a verb.

Grammatical word

No preceding subject NP

TAM markers occur in clause-initial position under subject deletion:

- (9) a. tētē m rara [**m** rara] ...
baby TAM cry TAM cry
'The baby was crying [and crying] ...' ASB.053
b. ... |raram|rara|...
- (10) a. dirē k van 'anē [**k** van rōw ma 'anē]
3PL TAM go DEM TAM go down hither DEM
'Then they went [and came down].' ASMS.163
b. ... |ʔanəkʔ|van|

→ While the subject may be deleted if the context provides the necessary information, this is not true for the verb.

Grammatical word

Other elements between Subj and TAM

Other morphemes that are not part of the subject NP may intervene between the latter and the TAM marker:

- (11) nik wo **m** ma' ba no k ma' rek
1SG COND TAM dead CONJ 1SG TAM dead too

'If you die, then I want to die, too.'

ANV.079

- (12) no so **k** mi'ir
1SG PROSP TAM sleep

'I'd like to sleep.'

Francois 2007

Grammatical word

Other elements between TAM marker and verb

However, one example in my corpus shows the prospective marker intervening between TAM marker and verb:

- (13) 'alē duru k van 'anē [**k** so 'ara bē]
alright 3DL TAM go DEM TAM PROSP scoop water
'Alright, then the two went in order to get water.'

ASMW.183

Preliminary conclusions

PHONOLOGICAL WORD: preceding word + TAM

GRAMMATICAL WORD: TAM marker + verb(al root)

Mismatch between phonological and grammatical words (cf. Aikhenvald & Dixon 2002:29)

Confirms Francois' (2007) analysis of *k* as a prefix in Vera'a rather than part of a protmonteau morph formed with preceding pronoun, as in neighbouring languages.

How to treat pauses?

Pausing before TAM marker

Pauses occur before TAM markers only if no subject NP is present in the clause:

- (14) ... lē n qila 'anē'ē (0.6) **m** kal ba 'enteg sar
LOC ART bay DEM PAUSE TAM enter inside well inside
'... into the bay, went well into it.' ISAM.039
- (15) okay (1.9) **k** van ma mē diē
okay (FILLED PAUSE) TAM go hither DAT 3SG
'Okay, came to him.' JEM.031

These examples are extremely rare in the corpus. For *k*, it is the only one.

How to treat pauses?

Pausing after TAM marker

Pauses frequently occur after subject NP + TAM marker and also after sole TAM markers:

(16) dirē k (0.7) sag gōr diē
3PL TAM PAUSE sit protect 3SG
'They were sitting guarding after her.' ASMS.058

(17) no k van ē k (1.5) bu'uñ ēn nōk ēn nōl qe'e
1SG TAM go ?? TAM FILLED.PAUSE plant ART my.thing ART top taro
'I'll go and plant my taro tops.' ASMS.094

Does Vera'a allow for pausing within a grammatical word, between affix and lexical root?

Not with e.g. possessive suffixes attached to nouns, clear cases of affixes.

False starts and corrections

Restarts after TAM marker

If the correction triggers the subject NP, then the cut-off point is always after subject NP + TAM marker:

- (18) no **k** (CORR) nikē da n mogi
1SG TAM 2SG.AOR make ART his.drink

'I ... you're gonna prepare his (kava).'

TNK.005

- (19) duru **m** (CORR) dirē **m** van 'ō kal ...
3DL TAM 3PL M go carry upwards

'The two ... they brought (us) up here ...'

GMV.020

Restarts and corrections

Restarts after the TAM marker

If the correction triggers the TAM marker, the pronoun is repeated together with the latter:

- (20) dirē **m** (1.7) dirē **k** van
3PL TAM (PAUSE) 3PL TAM go
'They ?? ... then they went.'

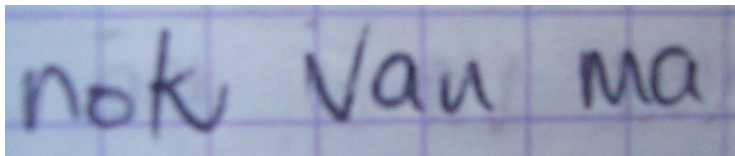
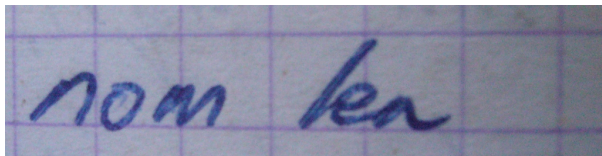
HHAK.013

These examples seem to suggest that we do not deal simply with a 'mismatch' of phonological and grammatical word.

Writing of TAM markers in native speaker's transcriptions

The 'unproblematic' cases

In structures [SUBJ NP TAM VERB], TAM markers *m* and *k* are written in a unit with only or rightmost NP constituent, i.e. the phonological word:

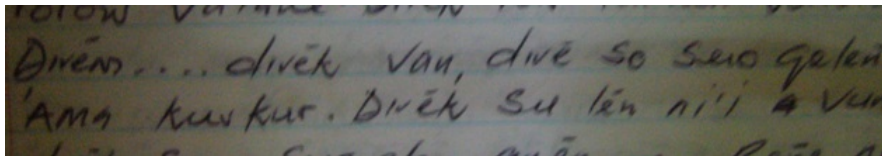


- (3') a. no **m** len gunuk
b. nom len gunuk
- (4') a. no **k** van ma
b. nok van ma

Writing of TAM markers

Corrections

With corrections, TAM markers are written in unit with e.g. the preceding pronoun, dots seem to indicate that something is 'wrong' here:



20' a. dirē **m** (1.7) dirē **k** van ...

3PL TAM PAUSE 3PL TAM go

'They ?? ... then they went ...'

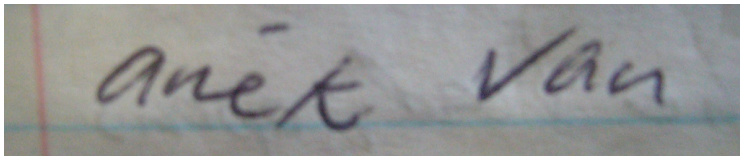
b. dirēm...dirēk van

HHAK.013

Writing of TAM markers

TAM markers in clause-initial position

TAM markers in clause-initial position are written in one orthographical word with the preceding word, though this is part of the preceding clause:



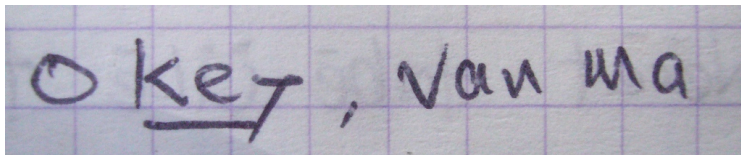
- 10' a. dirē k van 'anē [k van rōw ma 'anē]
3PL TAM go DEM TAM go down hither DEM
'Then they went [and came down].'
b. dirēk van 'anēk van rōw ma

ASMS.163

Writing of TAM markers

TAM markers in clause-initial position

If TAM markers occur after pauses at the beginning of a clause, they are edited out:



- 15' a. okey (1.9) k van ma mē diē
okay (FILLED PAUSE) TAM go hither DAT 3SG
'Okay, came to him.'
- b. okey, van ma mē diē

JEM.031

Conclusions

Linguistic analysis

A lot of evidence for a prefix analysis (cf. Francois 2007)

But: An enclitic analysis might be available, as well.

The formal characteristics of the TAM markers in questions make it hard to accommodate these morphophonologically in some contexts.

Is a language change underway, possibly resolving the 'unstable' situation?

Will Vera'a follow the tendency in neighbouring languages (cf. Francois 2007) to develop fused forms of PRO + TAM?

Is probable also from typological perspective (cf. Mushin 2006): tendency for PERS / NUM information to cluster with TAM information at the beginning of a clause or in second position.

Still, a prefix analysis (following Francois (2007)) may be the most 'straightforward', as it covers most of the examples, and may be the one opted for in the sketch grammar - with comments.

Conclusions

Writing / orthography

The writing of TAM markers should be kept as it is, also in edited texts.

Hand-written transcriptions should be documented, e.g. as scanned texts which can be archived alongside with the recordings and annotations.

Though they provide valuable information on (mainly one!) native speaker's intuition, they should not drive the linguistic analysis.

These transcriptions need to be further analyzed.

The documentation should capture all the linguistic facts, as 'untidy' as they may be in some instances.

It should be a source for further research rather than a 'convincing', final analysis.

The linguistic analysis should not be imposed on all the outputs involved in a language documentation.

Conflicts between writing and linguistic analysis should be commented on in the annotations of the recordings, and these should be linked to the linguistic analysis, i.e. the sketch grammar (cf. Schultze-Berndt 2006).

Interlinking (Schultze-Berndt 2006)

